BRET·HARTE

HER LETTER

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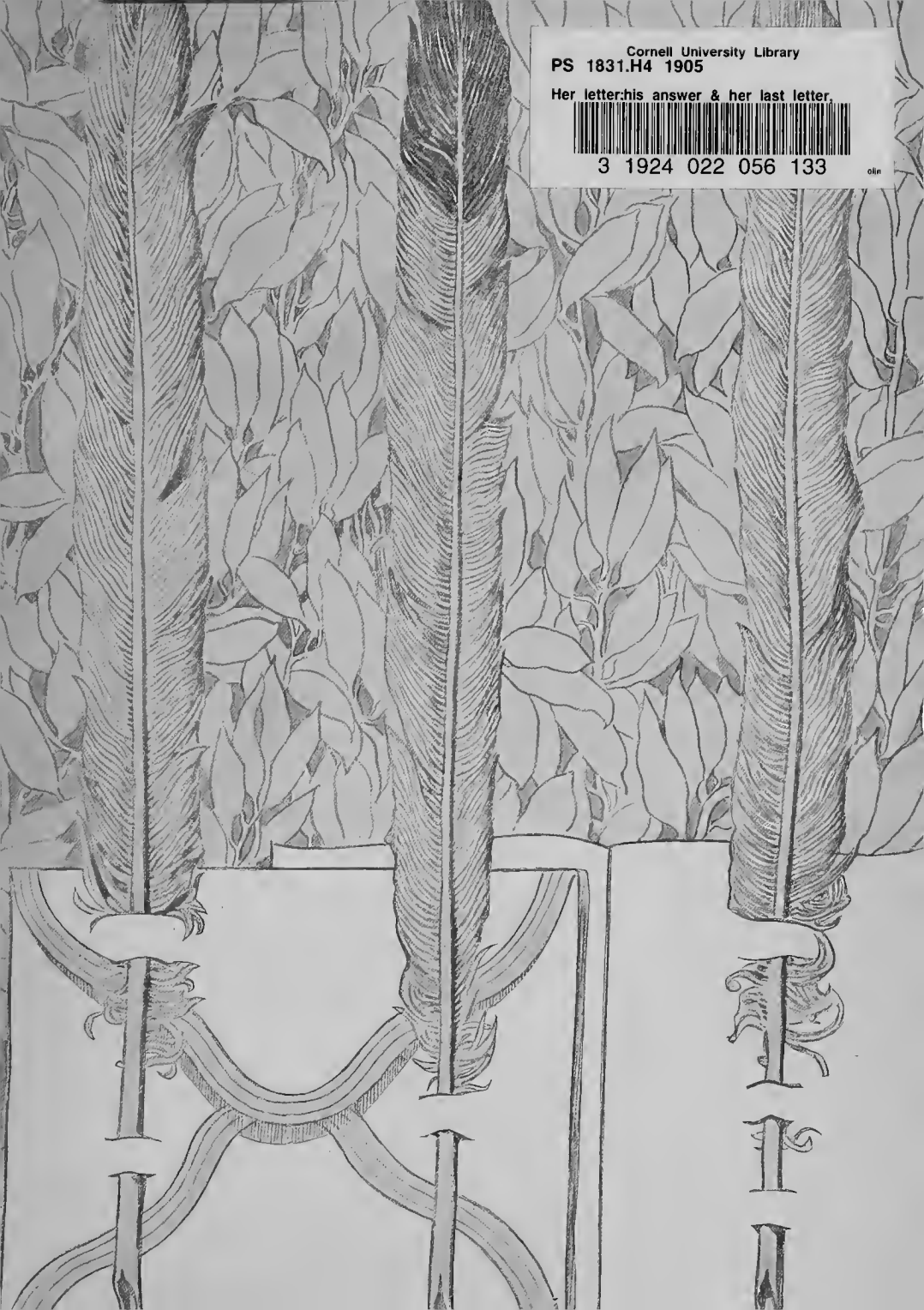
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I'm sitting alone by the fire,
Dressed just as I came from the dance

HER LETTER

His Answer & Her Last Letter

By BRET HARTE

Pictured by ARTHUR I KELLER

Boston & New York
HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN & COMPANY
The RIVERSIDE PRESS, CAMBRIDGE
1905

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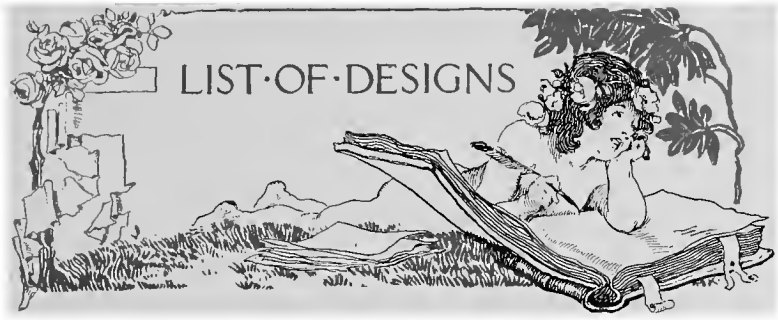
PUBLISHERS' NOTE

The first two of the poems here printed have long been popular favorites, but the third was not written till near the end of Mr. Harte's life. It rounds out the romance with such completeness and charm that it is peculiarly fitting that the poems should be grouped, and issued in a form worthy of their own excellence. The coöperation of Mr. Keller was secured for making the illustrations, not only on account of his recognized ability as an artist, but also because of his admiration for Mr. Harte's writings and his previous success in illustrating several of the stories.

Boston, 4 Park St., October, 1905.



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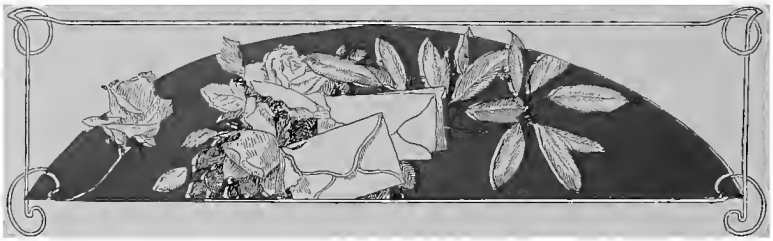
All the headpieces and other decorations are from Mr. Keller's designs.

HER LETTER

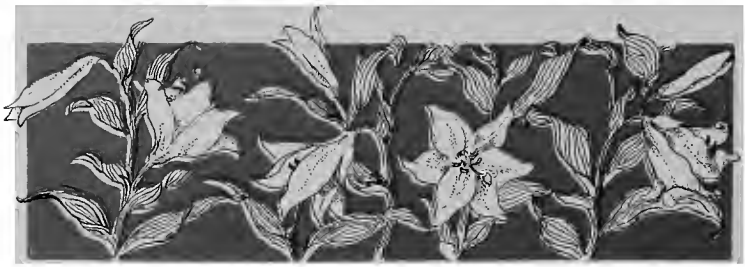


I'm sitting alone by the fire,
Dressed just as I came from the dance,
In a robe even *you* would admire,—
It cost a cool thousand in France;
I'm be-diamonded out of all reason,
My hair is done up in a cue:
In short, sir, "the belle of the season"
Is wasting an hour upon you.

In short, sir, "the belle of the season"
Is wasting an hour upon you

A DOZEN engagements I 've broken;
I left in the midst of a set;
Likewise a proposal, half spoken,
That waits — on the stairs — for me yet.
They say he 'll be rich, — when he grows up, —
And then he adores me indeed;
And you, sir, are turning your nose up,
Three thousand miles off, as you read.

Likewise a proposal, half spoken,
That waits — on the stairs — for me yet



"And how do I like my position?"

"And what do I think of New York?"

"And now, in my higher ambition,

With whom do I waltz, flirt, or talk?"

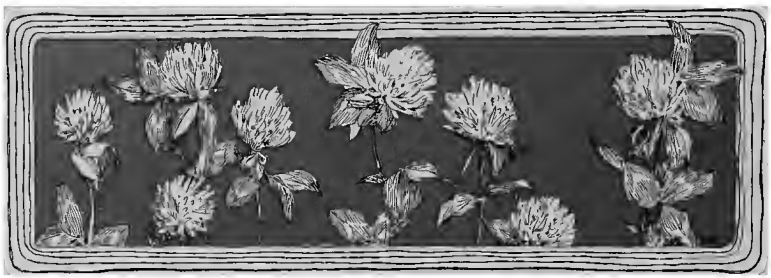
"And isn't it nice to have riches,

And diamonds and silks, and all that?"

"And aren't they a change to the ditches

And tunnels of Poverty Flat?"

With whom do I waltz, flirt, or talk?



WELL, yes,—if you saw us out driving
Each day in the Park, four-in-hand,
If you saw poor dear mamma contriving
To look supernaturally grand,—
If you saw papa's picture, as taken
By Brady, and tinted at that,—
You'd never suspect he sold bacon
And flour at Poverty Flat.

If you saw poor dear Mamma contriving
To look supernaturally grand

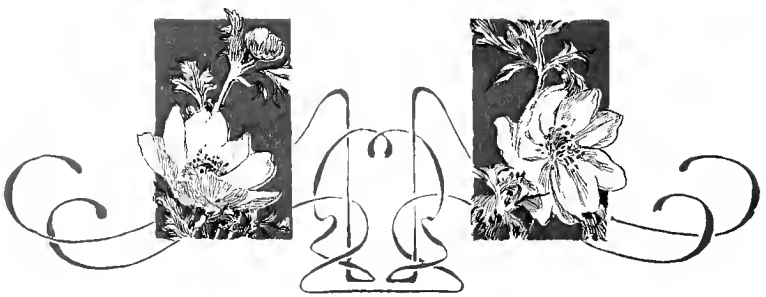
And yet, just this moment, when sitting
In the glare of the grand chandelier,—
In the bustle and glitter befitting
The "finest *soirée* of the year,"—
In the mists of a *gaze de Chambéry*,
And the hum of the smallest of talk,—
Somehow, Joe, I thought of the "Ferry,"
And the dance that we had on "The Fork;"

In the mists of a gaze de Chambéry,
And the hum of the smallest of talk

Of Harrison's barn, with its muster
Of flags festooned over the wall;
Of the candles that shed their soft lustre
And tallow on head-dress and shawl;
Of the steps that we took to one fiddle,
Of the dress of my queer *vis-à-vis;*
And how I once went down the middle
With the man that shot Sandy McGee;

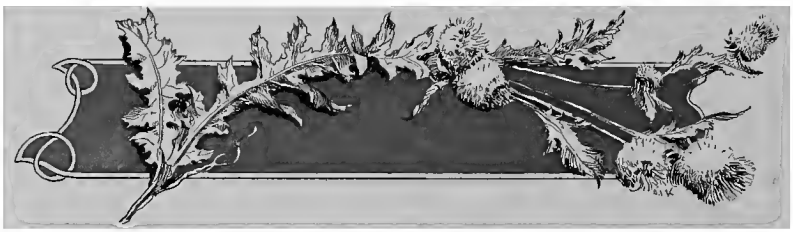
And how I once went down the middle
With the man that shot Sandy McGee

The man that shot Sandy McGee



Of the moon that was quietly sleeping
On the hill, when the time came to go;
Of the few baby peaks that were peeping
From under their bedclothes of snow;
Of that ride, — that to me was the rarest;
Of — the something you said at the gate.
Ah! Joe, then I was n't an heiress
To "the best-paying lead in the State."

Of that ride, — that to me was the rarest

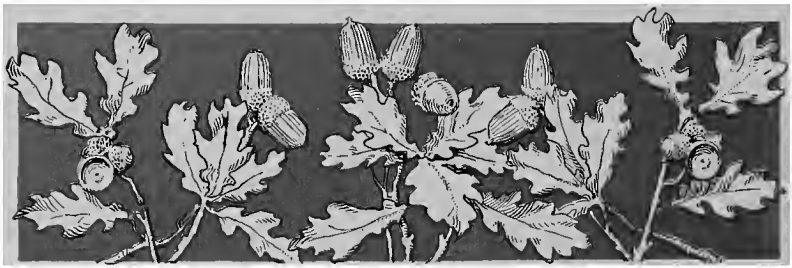


Well, well, it 's all past; yet it 's funny
To think, as I stood in the glare
Of fashion and beauty and money,
That I should be thinking, right there,
Of some one who breasted high water,
And swam the North Fork, and all that,
Just to dance with old Folinsbee's daughter,
The Lily of Poverty Flat.

And swam the North Fork, and all that,
Just to dance with old Folinsbee's daughter

But goodness! what nonsense I'm writing!
(Mamma says my taste still is low),
Instead of my triumphs reciting,
I'm spooning on Joseph,—heigh-ho!
And I'm to be "finished" by travel,—
Whatever 's the meaning of that.
Oh, why did papa strike pay gravel
In drifting on Poverty Flat?

Mamma says my taste still is low



GOOD-NIGHT!—here's the end of my paper;
Good-night!—if the longitude please,—
For maybe, while wasting my taper,
Your sun 's climbing over the trees.
But know, if you have n't got riches,
And are poor, dearest Joe, and all that,
That my heart 's somewhere there in the ditches,
And you 've struck it,—on Poverty Flat.

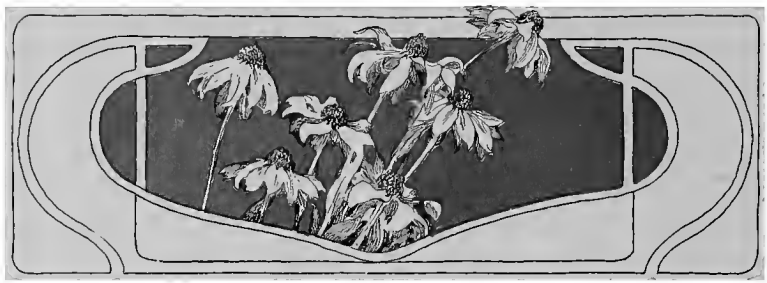
That my heart's somewhere there in the ditches,
And you've struck it, — on Poverty Flat

HIS ANSWER

BEING asked by an intimate party,—
Which the same I would term as a friend,—
Though his health it were vain to call hearty,
Since the mind to deceit it might lend;
For his arm it was broken quite recent,
And there's something gone wrong with his lung,—
Which is why it is proper and decent
I should write what he runs off his tongue.

Which is why it is proper and decent
I should write what he runs off his tongue

Being asked by an intimate party

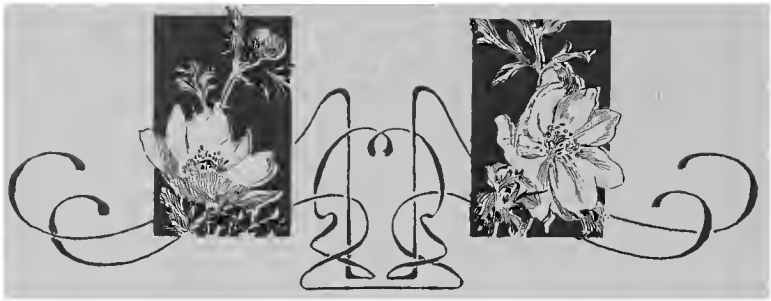


FIRST, he says, Miss, he 's read through your letter
To the end,—and "the end came too soon;"
That a "slight illness kept him your debtor,"
(Which for weeks he was wild as a loon);
That "his spirits are buoyant as yours is;"
That with you, Miss, he "challenges Fate"
(Which the language that invalid uses
At times it were vain to relate).

That "his spirits are buoyant as yours is;"
That with you, Miss, he "challenges Fate"

And he says "that the mountains are fairer
For once being held in your thought;"
That each rock "holds a wealth that is rarer
Than ever by gold-seeker sought."
(Which are words he would put in these pages,
By a party not given to guile;
Though the claim not, at date, paying wages,
Might produce in the sinful a smile.)

Though the claim not, at date, paying wages,
Might produce in the sinful a smile



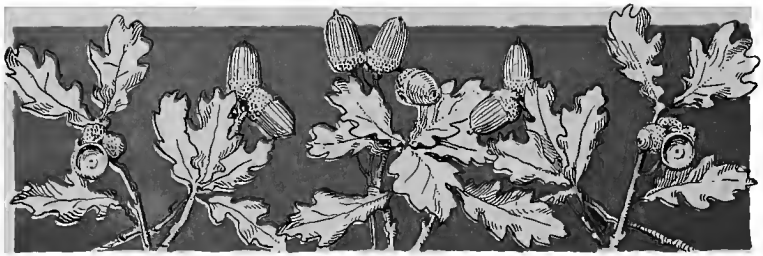
He remembers the ball at the Ferry,
And the ride, and the gate, and the vow,
And the rose that you gave him, — that very
Same rose he is "treasuring now."
(Which his blanket he 's kicked on his trunk,
Miss,
And insists on his legs being free;
And his language to me from his bunk, Miss,
Is frequent and painful and free.)

And the rose that you gave him

And his language to me from his bunk, Miss,
Is frequent and painful and free

He hopes you are wearing no willows,
But are happy and gay all the while;
That he knows — (which this dodging of pillows
Imparts but small ease to the style,
And the same you will pardon) — he knows,
Miss,
That, though parted by many a mile,
"Yet, were *he* lying under the snows, Miss,
They 'd melt into tears at your smile."

Which this dodging of pillows
Imparts but small ease to the style

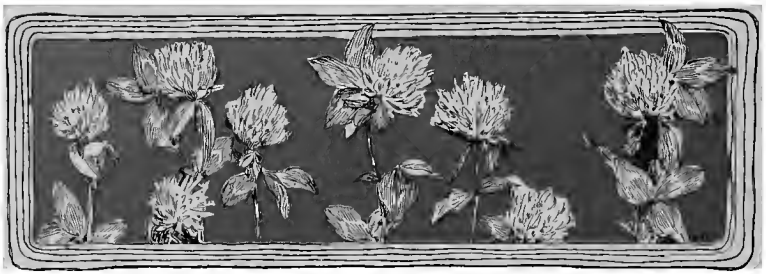


And "you 'll still think of him in your pleasures,
In your brief twilight dreams of the past;
In this green laurel spray that he treasures, —
It was plucked where your parting was last;
In this specimen, — but a small trifle, —
It will do for a pin for your shawl."
(Which, the truth not to wickedly stifle,
Was his last week's "clean up," — and *his all.*)

In this green laurel-spray that he treasures,
It was plucked where your parting was last

He's asleep, which the same might seem strange,
Miss,
Were it not that I scorn to deny
That I raised his last dose, for a change, Miss,
In view that his fever was high;
But he lies there quite peaceful and pensive.
And now, my respects, Miss, to you;
Which my language, although comprehensive,
Might seem to be freedom, is true.

But he lies there quite peaceful and pensive



For I have a small favor to ask you,
As concerns a bull-pup, and the same,—
If the duty would not overtask you,—
You would please to procure for me, *game;*
And send per express to the Flat, Miss,—
For they say York is famed for the breed,
Which, though words of deceit may be that, Miss,
I'll trust to your taste, Miss, indeed.

For I have a small favor to ask you,
As concerns a bull-pup

P.S.—Which this same interfering
Into other folks' way I despise;
Yet if it so be I was hearing
That it 's just empty pockets as lies
Between you and Joseph, it follers
That, having no family claims,
Here's my pile, which it's six hundred dollars,
As is *yours*, with respects,

TRUTHFUL JAMES.

Here 's my pile ; which it 's six hundred dollars,
As is yours, with respects

HER LAST LETTER

JUNE 4th! Do you know what that date means?
June 4th! by this air and these pines!
Well, —only you know how I hate scenes,—
These might be my very last lines!
For perhaps, sir, you 'll kindly remember —
If some *other* things you 've forgot—
That you last wrote the 4th of *December*, —
Just six months ago! — from this spot;

That you last wrote the 4th of December, --
Just six months ago! — from this spot

From this spot, that you said was "the fairest
For once being held in my thought."
Now, really I call that the barest
Of — well, I won't say what I ought!
For here *I* am back from my "riches,"
My "triumphs," my "tours," and all that;
And *you*'re not to be found in the ditches
Or temples of Poverty Flat!

And you're not to be found in the ditches
Or temples of Poverty Flat!

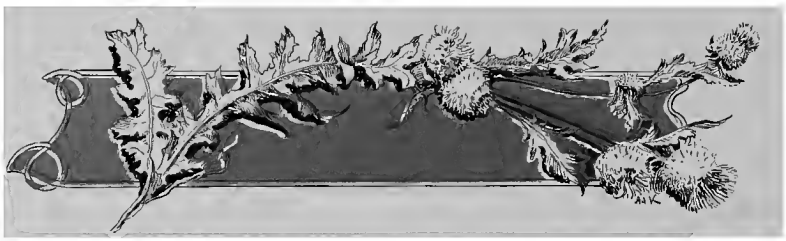
From this spot, that you said was "the fairest
For once being held in my thought"

From Paris we went for the season
To London, when pa wired, "Stop."
Mamma says "his *health*" was the reason.
(I've heard that some things took a "drop.")
But she said if my patience I 'd summon
I could go back with him to the Flat —
Perhaps I was thinking of some one
Who of me — well — was not thinking *that!*

From Paris we went for the season
To London, when Pa wired, "Stop"

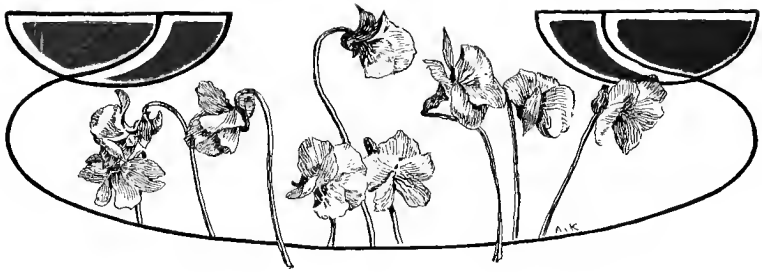
Of course you will *say* that I "never
Replied to the letter you wrote."
That is just like a man! But, however,
I read it — or how could I quote?
And as to the stories you 've heard (No,
Don't tell me you have n't — I know!)
You 'll not believe one blessed word, Joe;
But just whence they came, let them go!

And as to the stories you've heard (No,
Don't tell me you have n't — I know!)



And they came from Sade Lotski of Yolo,
Whose father sold clothes on the Bar —
You called him Job-lotski, you know, Joe,
And the boys said *her* value was *par*.
Well, we met her in Paris — just flaring
With diamonds, and lost in a hat!
And she asked me "How Joseph was faring
In his love-suit on Poverty Flat!"

Whose father sold clothes on the Bar —
You called him Job-lotski, you know, Joe



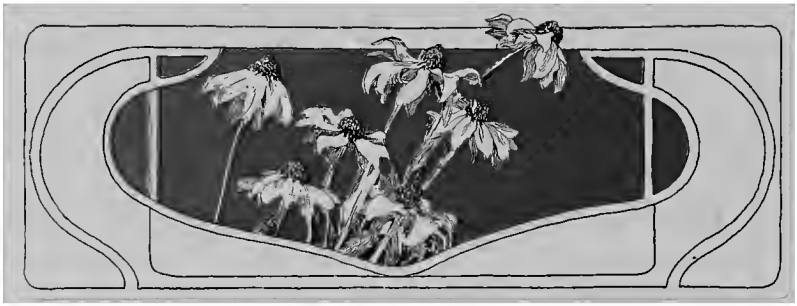
She thought it would shame me! I met her
With a look, Joe, that made her eyes drop;
And I said that your "love-suit fared better
Than any suit out of *their* shop!"
And I did n't blush *then* — as I 'm doing
To find myself here, all alone,
And left, Joe, to do all the "suing"
To a lover that 's certainly flown.

I met her
With a look, Joe, that made her eyes drop

And I did n't blush then — as I'm doing
To find myself here, all alone

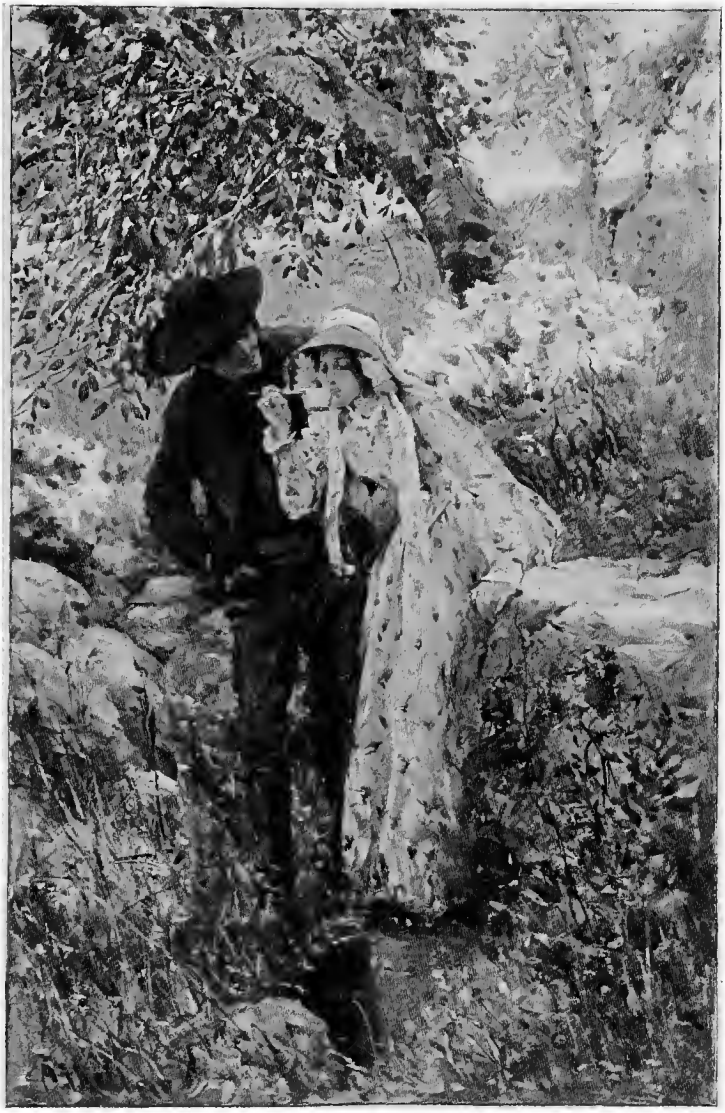
In this brand-new hotel, called "The Lily"
(I wonder who gave it that name?),
I really am feeling quite silly,
To think I was once called the same;
And I stare from its windows, and fancy
I'm labeled to each passer-by.
Ah! gone is the old necromancy,
For nothing seems right to my eye.

Ah! gone is the old necromancy,
For nothing seems right to my eye

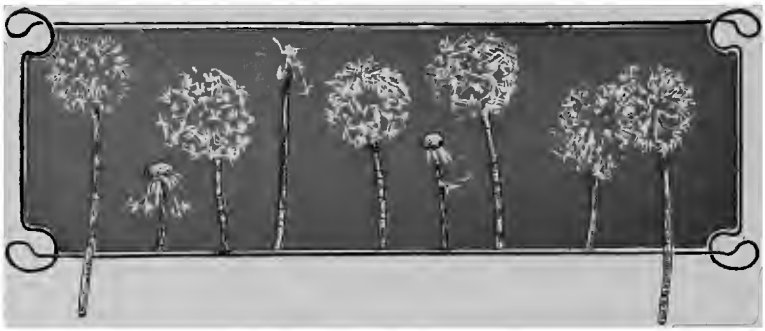


On that hill there are stores that I knew not;
There's a street—where I once lost my way;
And the copse where you once tied my shoe-knot
Is shamelessly open as day!
And that bank by the spring—I once drank there,
And you called the place Eden, you know;
Now, I'm banished like Eve—though the bank there
Is belonging to "Adams and Co."

And that bank by the spring — I once drank there,
And you called the place Eden, you know

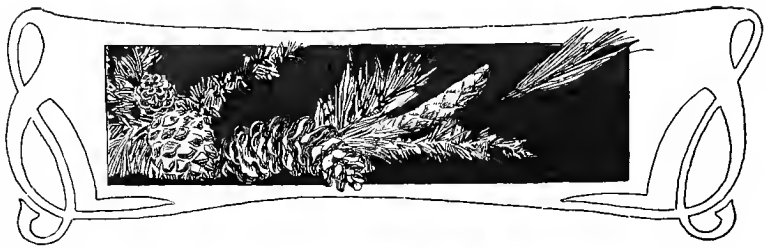


And the copse where you once tied my shoe-knot
Is shamelessly open as day!



THERE 's the rustle of silk on the sidewalk;
Just now there passed by a tall hat;
But there's gloom in this "boom" and this wild talk
Of the "future" of Poverty Flat.
There's a decorous chill in the air, Joe,
Where once we were simple and free;
And I hear they've been making a mayor, Joe,
Of the man who shot Sandy McGee.

There 's the rustle of silk on the sidewalk;
Just now there passed by a tall hat



But there's still the "lap, lap" of the river;
There's the song of the pines, deep and low.
(How my longing for them made me quiver
In the park that they call Fontainebleau!)
There's the snow-peak that looked on our dances,
And blushed when the morning said, "Go!"
There's a lot that remains which one fancies—
But somehow there's never a Joe!

But there's still the "lap, lap" of the river;
There's the song of the pines, deep and low

There's a lot that remains which one fancies

PERHAPS, on the whole, it is better,
For you might have been changed like the rest;
Though it's strange that I'm trusting this letter
To papa, just to have it addressed.
He thinks he may find you, and really
Seems kinder now I'm all alone.
You might have been here, Joe, if merely
To *look* what I'm willing to *own*.

He thinks he may find you

WELL, well! that 's all past; so good-night, Joe;
Good-night to the river and Flat;
Good-night to what 's wrong and what 's right,
Joe;
Good-night to the past, and all that—
To Harrison's barn, and its dancers;
To the moon, and the white peak of snow;
And good-night to the cañon that answers
My "Joe!" with its echo of "No!"

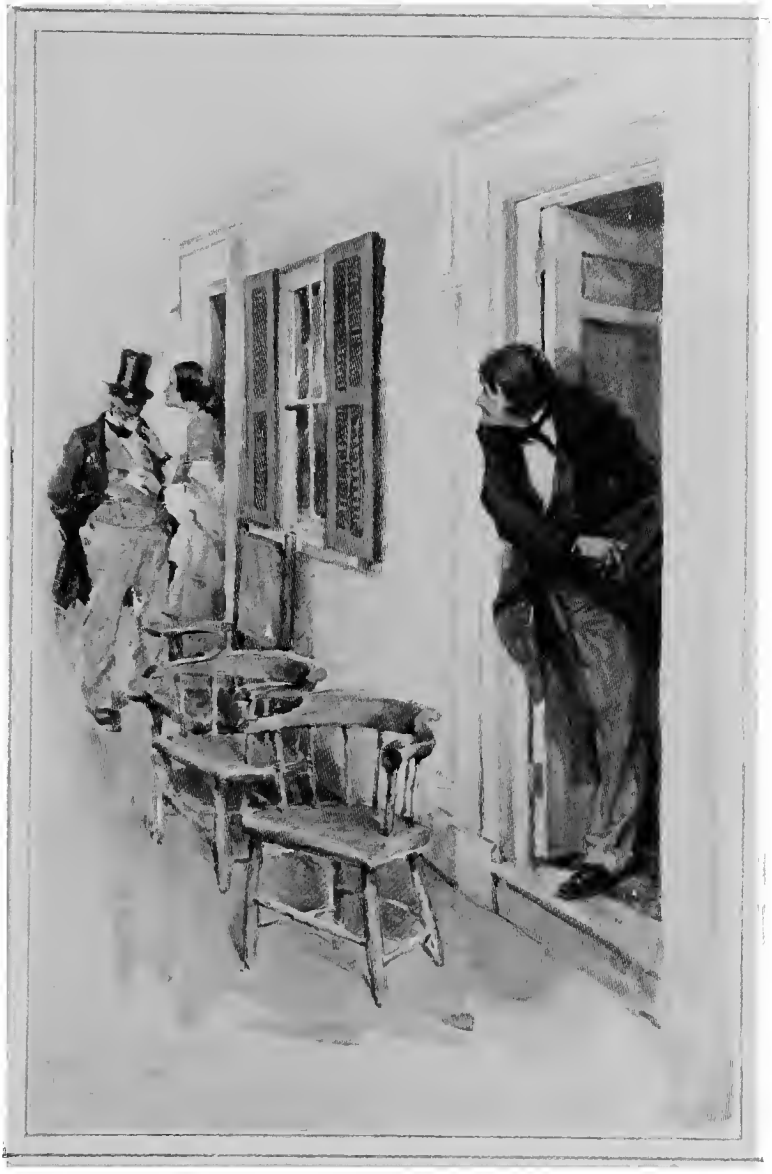
And good-night to the cañon that answers
My "Joe!" with its echo of "No!"

P.S. — I've just got your note. You deceiver!
How dared you — how *could* you? Oh, Joe!
To think I've been kept a believer
In things that were six months ago!
And it's *you* 've built this house, and the bank, too,
And the mills, and the stores, and all that!
And for everything changed I must thank *you*,
Who have "struck it" on Poverty Flat!

I've just got your note. You deceiver!

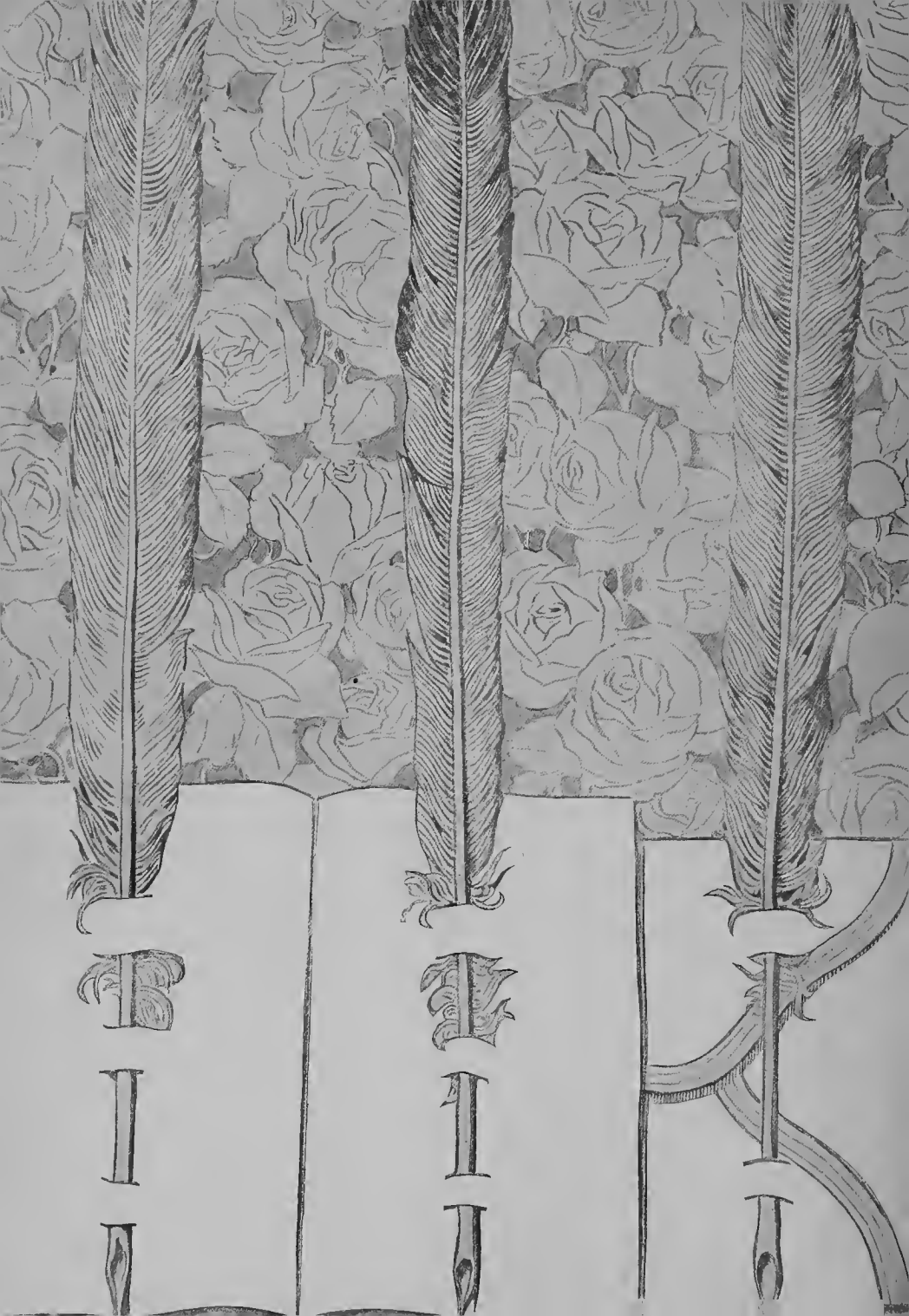
How dared you get rich — you great stupid! —
Like papa, and some men that I know,
Instead of just trusting to Cupid
And to me for your money? Ah, Joe!
Just to think you sent never a word, dear,
Till you wrote to papa for consent!
Now I know why they had me transferred here,
And "the health of papa" — what *that* meant!

Now I know why they had me transferred here,
And "the health of papa" — what that meant!



How dared you get rich — you great stupid! —
Like papa, and some men that I know

Now I know why they call this "The Lily;"
Why the man who shot Sandy McGee
You made mayor! 'T was because — oh, you silly! —
He once "went down the middle" with me!
I 've been fooled to the top of my bent here,
So come, and ask pardon — you know
That you 've still got to get *my* consent, dear!
And just think what that echo said — Joe!

The man who shot Sandy McGee
You made mayor!

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